

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L OTTAWA 04303

LIMDIS/STADIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ENRG, PGOV, PINT, SENV, CA
SUBJECT: ROLE OF PARLIAMENT IN REACHING NORTHERN
PIPELINE DECISION

REF: (A) OTTAWA 3732 (B) OTTAWA 3887

1. DCM AND EMBOFF CALLED ON PIPELINE COORDINATOR BASIL ROBINSON MAY 25 TO FOLLOW UP ON ROBINSON'S DISCUSSIONS WITH USG OFFICIALS IN WASHINGTON LAST WEEK AND EXCHANGE VIEWS ON STATE OF PLAY OF PIPELINE DECISION IN BOTH GOVERNMENTS.

2. DURING CONVERSATION ROBINSON PROVIDED NEW INSIGHTS ON HOW GOVERNMENT MIGHT INVOLVE PARLIAMENT IN PIPELINE DECISION WHICH HE APPARENTLY DID NOT SHARE IN WASHINGTON. HE SAID THAT NO FIRM STRATEGY HAS EVOLVED BEYOND COMMITMENT MADE EARLIER BY HOUSE LEADER ALLAN MACEACHEN TO HAVE A PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE ON PIPELINE DECISION (SEE REFTEL A) AND STRESSED THAT LENGTH AND TIMING OF DEBATE HAS YET TO BE DECIDED. ROBINSON DESCRIBED THREE POSSIBLE STEPS IN CONSIDERATION OF DECISION BY PARLIAMENT: (1) A DEBATE PERMITTING MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT TO EXPRESS THEIR VIEWS ON WHETHER TO CONSTRUCT A LINE ACROSS CANADA, (2) RATIFICATION
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BY PARLIAMENT OF DECISION IN PRINCIPLE BY GOVERNMENT WHETHER TO CONSTRUCT PIPELINE AND (3) ENABLING LEGISLATION WHICH WOULD CREATE BUREAUCRATIC MACHINERY REQUIRED TO PROCEED WITH CONSTRUCTION (POSSIBLE EXAMPLES WOULD BE CREATION OF A PIPELINE AUTHORITY AND/OR FINANCIAL GUARANTEES). ROBINSON SAID THAT NONE OF THESE STEPS COULD BE TAKEN UNTIL AFTER AUGUST 1 DEADLINE FOR LYSYK REPORT.

PRESUMABLY, A REASONABLE AMOUNT OF TIME AFTER THAT WOULD BE REQUIRED FOR PARLIAMENT TO REVIEW LYSYK'S FINDINGS. ROBINSON INDICATED THAT A KEY ISSUE IS WHETHER DEBATE, STEP (1) ABOVE, WOULD PRECEDE OR FOLLOW GOVERNMENT'S DECISION. HE SAID IT IS POSSIBLE THAT GOVERNMENT MIGHT DECIDE IN PRINCIPLE TO APPROVE

(OR DISAPPROVE) A LINE ACROSS CANADA AND COMMUNICATE THIS DECISION TO USG BEFORE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE. HOWEVER, IT IS MORE LIKELY, ROBINSON SAID, THAT GOVERNMENT WILL WANT DEBATE TO PRECEDE DECISION IN PRINCIPLE, WHICH WILL PROBABLY BE COMMUNICATED TO USG BEFORE SEPTEMBER 1, AND WILL THUS SCHEDULE DEBATE SOMETIME IN MID-AUGUST. HE ALSO INDICATED THAT STEPS (2) AND (3) MIGHT TAKE PLACE SOMETIME AFTER DECISION IN PRINCIPLE HAD BEEN COMMUNICATED TO USG AND THAT THESE STEPS MIGHT BE MERGED INTO ONE, THAT IS, SIMULTANEOUS PARLIAMENTARY APPROVAL OF CONSTRUCTION OF LINE AND ENABLING LEGISLATION.

3. EMBASSY COMMENT: ROBINSON'S REMARKS HIGHLIGHT POLITICAL DILEMMA GOVERNMENT FACES IN ATTEMPTING TO MANAGE PIPELINE DECISION WHILE AT SAME TIME KEEPING PARLIAMENT MEANINGFULLY INVOLVED. DIVISION IN PARLIAMENT ON ISSUE DOES NOT FOLLOW CLEAR-CUT PARTY LINES AND GOVERNMENT DOES NOT KNOW AT THIS STAGE HOW DEBATE WOULD GO SO IT MUST CAREFULLY ORCHESTRATE EVENTS LEADING UP TO DEBATE IN ORDER TO AVOID FULL PLAY OF POLITICAL RHETORIC WHICH COULD DESTROY REASONED CONSIDERATION OF ISSUE. ON THE OTHER HAND, GOVERNMENT MUST NOT CONVEY CONFIDENTIAL

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IMPRESSION THAT IT IS STIFLING PARLIAMENT. GOVERNMENT IS THEREFORE PROCEEDING CAUTIOUSLY, WAITING FOR PUBLICATION OF NEB REPORT TO SHARPEN PARAMETERS OF DISCUSSION BEFORE IT MAPS FINAL LEGISLATIVE STRATEGY. ENDERS

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